

**Office of Public Health Emergency Preparedness
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Request for Information for Planning Purposes

Contracting Office Address

Department of Health and Human Services/ Program Support Center (PSC)

Name of Project

Portal for Verification of Healthcare Professionals' Qualifications

Purpose

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) requests information from commercial vendors regarding capabilities to develop a nationwide verification system that will provide HHS with an integrated range of information concerning the professional qualifications of healthcare professionals responding to a disaster or public health emergency.

Currently, this information is available through several public and private data repositories. HHS intends to develop a portal to provide online access to these multiple data elements to government medical incident officials. This is a request for information for planning purposes only, and HHS does not intend to award a contract on the basis of this solicitation or to otherwise pay for the information submitted. HHS will use responses to this RFI as information only and may respond to questions and comments as necessary.

Background

On September 11, 2001, many healthcare professionals traveled to New York City to volunteer their services but were turned away because their credentials and their qualifications could not be verified. HHS is committed to maximizing our nation's medical response capacities during national emergencies and preventing a similar situation from occurring in the future.

In the event of an emergency, HHS has the authority to provide civilian health care professionals with federal status while responding to a medical incident. HHS officials coordinating emergency responses must be able to authenticate stated professional qualifications through an online verification system in a rapid and accurate manner while complying with federal privacy and confidentiality laws.

HHS needs a healthcare provider verification system that uses an online portal (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) that would provide HHS with access to all relevant healthcare provider data. This information must include, but not be limited to contact information, personal identification, state license information, board certifications, disciplinary actions, hospital privileges, academic history, and more. This information would be utilized for disaster planning, real-time disaster management, and must be searchable via several key entries.

HHS anticipates that the portal for verification could be accessed in one or both of two ways: (1) the HHS incident manager would access relevant data through the portal by a mining system managed by the vendor, or (2) the vendor would be responsible for providing the information requested on demand. Other designs are also possible, and vendors are encouraged to propose other primary (web-based) and back-up strategies. (This paragraph may be added to the Project Requirement section)

Project Requirements

The portal must satisfy two immediate requirements:

1. The immediate need for federal officials to verify the identity and qualifications of healthcare volunteers during emergencies in order to hire them under any applicable HHS direct hiring authority.
2. The need for federal officials to verify the identity and qualifications of healthcare professionals during non-emergency situations as part of contingency planning effort(s).

Solutions to these two requirements will allow pre-authorized federal officials to initiate a search at anytime (24/7) from any location nationwide, by entering elements such as:

- Provider's name
- Provider identifiers
- Provider specialty
- Other search protocols that might target individuals by certain specialties or certifications (certified registered nurses, anesthesiologists, etc).

The portal search results would verify personal information (to help determine the providers' identity) and professional qualifications in real-time. The initial users would be HHS staff, HHS Regional Coordinators located throughout the U.S., the Public Health Service (PHS), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Also, HHS requires that the portal be capable of addressing the following future requirement:

1. Support a comprehensive national (federal, state and local) medical incident management.

In the event of a medical crisis or mass casualty incident, federal, state, and local officials must have access to the portal in order to obtain relevant information of healthcare professionals available for volunteer services in a given region or locale.

This future capability will allow federal, state and/or local officials to search by provider type, specialty, certifications, volunteer capability, or any other criteria requested by HHS to recruit healthcare providers with desired qualifications. The portal should provide healthcare providers' contact and personal information that could be used to request specialized assistance during emergencies. Currently, this future requirement is under development and is subject to change based on vendors' responses.

HHS anticipates that all applicable data accessed through the portal must come from existing public and private sources. HHS will search data and collect information through the portal in compliance with federal privacy laws. All other applicable statutory requirements including the paperwork reduction act, and third party database user agreements would need to be addressed by the vendor independently and/or with the owner of each database accessed through the portal.

Data Requirements

Credentialing information should be available for an array of healthcare professionals. These include, but are not limited to:

- Physicians
- Registered Nurses
- Advanced Practice Nurses, (NP's, CRNA's)
- Medical and Public Health Social Workers
- Psychologists
- Respiratory Therapists
- Physician Assistants
- Paramedics, EMT's
- Pharmacists, Pharmacy Technicians

The type of information to be verified and provided through the portal includes,

- Demographic and residence information
- Specialties and years of clinical Practice
- Academic History
- Certifications such as critical care nursing or physician board specialty, and/or specialty training such as advanced cardiac or trauma life support
- Residencies -- indicates residencies, internships, or fellowships where the practitioner received training.
- Government -- information from government sources such as registration with the Drug Enforcement Administration.
- Hospital affiliation(s).
- State licenses and dates.
- Disciplinary actions (including federal and state board sanctions).
- Criminal records (sex offenders' registry, etc).
- Other information as required by HHS

Due to the sensitivity of the data accessed by the portal, HHS requests that vendors propose a security verification process for all portal users in order to safeguard all available information.

Phasing

HHS anticipates that the portal requirements would increase over the life of the contract in the following ways,

1. Additional users (from only federal users upon contract award to later add state and local officials)
2. Available “searchable” data could increase. This includes adding new (private, public, state and local) databases and professional groups.
3. Additional customized information to include identified health care professionals who are willing to volunteer for Federal emergency response.

Other Considerations

HHS will determine the criteria for who has access to the portal and the minimum information necessary to be provided by the portal. HHS would select databases that are most appropriate for these requirements.

Submission Requirements

HHS is interested in receiving vendor information, such as:

1. Vendors’ opinions about the difficulty and/or feasibility of the various functions that the portal will need to address.
2. Level of effort for portal development and operation.
3. Difficulties that HHS might face in work toward portal development and possible solutions.
4. Any information that might be helpful in finalization of HHS requirements.
5. Benefits and negatives to “deployable” vendor support in credential verification onsite, and recruitment of volunteers via portal queries.

Confidentiality

All information submitted is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Please clearly mark all submissions of data, cost, and relevant information that you consider procurement sensitive. We will keep that information confidential to the extent allowed by federal law.

Submission Information

Interested, responsible parties may submit comments on or before July 15, 2005. HHS prefers that all materials be submitted electronically (via e-mail) to the point of contact listed below.

Patrick A. Joy, Contracting Officer
HHS/Program Support Center
pscacquisitions@psc.gov

Subject to the availability of funds, HHS may conduct an industry day to gather feedback on this system and its implementation. Industry day date and time will be announced at a later date.

Disclaimer

This RFI is issued for information and planning purposes only and does not constitute a solicitation. The Government does not intend to award a contract on the basis of this RFI or to otherwise pay for information received in response to this RFI. All information received in response to this RFI that is marked Proprietary will be handled accordingly. Responses to the RFI will not be returned. Information provided in response to this RFI will be used to assess tradeoffs and alternatives available for determining how to proceed in the acquisition process for the project and may lead to the development of a specification for the Project. In accordance with Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 15.201(e), responses to this RFI are not offers and cannot be accepted by the Government to form a binding contract. Responders are solely responsible for all expenses associated with responding to this RFI.